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SIPDIS

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NSC FOR SENIOR AFRICA DIRECTOR C. COURVILLE

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TAGS: PGOV PREL PHUM PINR ASEC ECON ZI
SUBJECT: OPERATION RESTORE ORDER IN BULAWAYO

REF: HARARE 980

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires a.i., Eric T. Schultz under Section 1.
4 b/d

SUMMARY

¶1. (SBU) Operation Restore Order has had a profound effect on Bulawayo, Zimbabwe's second largest city, much as it has in other cities around the country. During a visit to Bulawayo with Staffdel Simpkins on July 3-4, embassy staff viewed scenes of devastation and relief efforts at sites for displaced families. Activists from Women of Zimbabwe Arise! (WOZA) offered compelling first person accounts of the destruction and individual coping efforts. MDC MP for Bulawayo David Coltart further described efforts to care for victims, elaborated on possible GOZ objectives, and conceded that internal strife had prevented the MDC from responding effectively to Restore Order. End Summary.

The Destruction in Bulawayo and Assistance to the Victims

¶2. (SBU) On July 4, the staffdel visited Kilarney, one of the destroyed settlements. There was little remaining of the settlement to indicate that it had ever been more than a large, grassy field. There was a piece of clothing in the mud and the occasional brick remains of a house. The rest, including rubble from most of the destroyed dwellings, had been cleared away. Only a handful of elderly men lingered in the area. World Vision field officer Kilton Moyo said that Kilarney had been created as a settlement by the Rhodesian government to move blacks out of the city when Bulawayo was much smaller. Some people had returned to the rural areas after independence, but the settlement had remained and received many new inhabitants in the 1980s, during the Gukurahundi, when the GOZ destroyed Ndebele villages and killed thousands of the ethnic minority.

¶3. (C) At an Anglican church providing assistance to the people of Kilarney and other such settlements, families were crowded on the small church grounds, most in makeshift shelters, with only one small tent sheltering a family. Father Barnabas Nauende said the church was providing the space, water, transportation for children to school (one truck that several churches chipped in to fuel), and baskets of foodstuffs. Parishioners had been collecting blankets and other items for distribution. The church was working with World Vision and other churches providing similar support. Doctors and nurses volunteered their time for a weekly clinic, and the church provided medicines. The church had held the weekly clinic before Operation Restore Order had begun but was experiencing such an increase in demand, that the last weekly clinic had completely wiped out the church's small store of medicines, which would normally last a few weeks. Doctors without Borders also had volunteer staff in the area and had visited the church.

¶4. (C) Nauende said the government had been trying to move all the displaced into a large transit camp but that various religious leaders had been resisting the removal, due to the fact that the government had no facilities of any kind of planned for the camp. So far, the churches had succeeded at keeping the displaced on their grounds. Nauende said he was very worried about water rationing by the city and that food had been diverted from other programs to feed the newly displaced but, thus far, the churches had been a powerful force in protecting the people. World Vision's Moyo echoed concerns about diversion of food aid. He said that, if famine struck as was probable, aid organizations would be in a poor position to assist.

WOZA Tales of Displacement

¶5. (C) WOZA activists, including leader Jenni Williams, met

with the staffdel in a private home in an attempt to elude CIO officers who track their activities. Members told their stories of displacement and discussed the challenges the group now faces. WOZA member Shingiria Mupani, a single mother of six school-age children, said she had been a trader, licensed by the City Council, since 1987 and had lived in the high-density suburb of Old Pumula since 1996. Police had descended on the market where she had had a stall and confiscated her bags of vegetables as she was unloading them. Later, police had forced her to dismantle her own home and told her to go back to her rural home. Mupani was from Buhera, but like many Ndebele her homestead had been destroyed during the Gukurahundi. Subsequent to the destructions of her home and business, she had been arrested after a June 29 WOZA demonstration and her fingerprints taken at the police station. She had been told that, even if she were acquitted of the charges, the fingerprints on record would prevent her from receiving one of the new housing plots or vending stalls the government had promised. The other women told similar stories.

¶16. (C) Mupani said that few Zimbabweans were demonstrating against the operation because Zimbabweans had never had any education in human rights and democracy and had a culture of obeying leaders who held the responsibility for society's future. Although people rose up in the liberation struggle, afterwards they thought the work had been done and they could now trust their leaders. In addition, Zimbabweans beyond those directly affected did not know what was going on. Williams said WOZA needed a way to get pictures of what was going on to others around the country in order to raise awareness because no Zimbabwean media dared run them.

¶17. (C) Williams said Operation Restore Order was placing the group under additional stress. She had not had contact with many members since their displacements. Several of the women were facing trial for one of their demonstrations and were without legal representation because a human rights legal fund had turned down their request for support, saying it did not meet the definition of emergency aid. The women said that they felt abandoned by others in civil society and by the international community.

David Coltart on Operation, MDC Reaction

¶18. (C) MDC MP David Coltart arrived late for a meeting at his offices on July 4. He said he had been at a meeting with constituents for whose self-help projects he was trying to find funding, and the meeting had run longer than expected because there were so many new projects presented aimed at relieving the effects of Restore Order.

¶19. (C) Coltart acknowledged that the MDC's internal divisions had prevented it from effectively opposing Restore Order. He said there were many possible explanations for the operation. He had heard a rumor that Solomon Mujuru was the driving force behind Restore Order as a way of exerting Zezuru power within the party. A second possibility was retribution against constituencies that the MDC believed it had actually won but had gone to ZANU-PF through fraud. Yet another was a preemptive strike against simmering anger by the populace concerning the deteriorating economic situation; the operations would distract them and render them unable to protest. Still another was that Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe Governor Gideon Gono was the driving force in a move to gather more foreign exchange. Finally, the operation was an opportunity for the GOZ to extend its patronage to the cities by getting rid of existing tenants and traders and giving out plots of land and trading stalls only to the favored and loyal. Coltart said that, whatever the motivations, the government's behavior during Restore Order was not an accident or an aberration; it was calculated.

Comment

¶10. (C) The Bulawayo visit once more underscored the depth of suffering Operation Restore Order has caused. Virtually no part of the country has been untouched, but the operation has had a particularly devastating effect on the Ndebele people who predominate in and around Bulawayo. It brought back memories of the horrors of the Gukurahundi and reminders of just how brutal a regime Robert Mugabe created.
SCHULTZ